



Thermal Energy Conversion Using Peltier Power

Grade/Subject: Physics

Strand/Standard PHYS.2.4 Design a solution by constructing a device that converts one form of energy into another form of energy to solve a complex real-life problem. *Define the problem, identify criteria and constraints, develop possible solutions using models, analyze data to make improvements from iteratively testing solutions, and optimize a solution.* Examples of energy transformation could include electrical energy to mechanical energy, mechanical energy to electrical energy, or electromagnetic radiation to thermal energy. (PS3.A, PS3.B, ETS1.A, ETS1.B, ETS1.C) (PS4.A, PS4.B, PS4.C).

Lesson Performance Expectations: Students will build and map the energy flow through a circuit. Students will observe energy transformed from heat into electrical energy with a thermoelectric device (Peltier Plate)

Materials:

A group of 4-6 needs

- 8 peltier plates
- 1 mini LED bulb (Lowest voltage possible - 1.8 V [here](#))
- 1 multimeter
- 2 aluminum trays that can stack (8" x 5")
- 10 alligator clips without wires (minimize the amount of wire or you lose voltage)
- Ice cubes or [ice packs](#) (small ziplock bags with water frozen flat)
- Source of hot water (suggested to have 1-2 electric kettle or lots of boiling water)
- Hot pads for transporting hot water

Phenomena - Class needs

- 2-3 battery holders with batteries (D)
- 2-3 peltier plates

Time: 70 minutes/ 1 period

Teacher Background Information:

- Although slightly different from what your students can do, these videos explain the concept of a Peltier Plate.
 - <https://www.marlow.com/how-do-thermoelectric-coolers-tecs-work>
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RC16MwzFq8A&t=6s>
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SvBeCCjb9ds>
- After students have explored the peltier plate this video is a good explanation of how it works
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2b2wAB1uTLI>
 - <https://learn.sparkfun.com/tutorials/how-to-use-a-multimeter/measuring-voltage>
- Places the Peltier Plates are used:
 - <https://www.ingenia.org.uk/Ingenia/Articles/2c6fe69c-857b-4b96-bdb6-7fa5c7e8ed7>

Student Background Knowledge:

- Students should understand the Law of Conservation of Energy,

- Students should know what a circuit is.
- Students need to know how to use a multimeter.
- It is very helpful for students to understand that a generator and a motor are reverse devices. There are other examples that will also give them clues that a Peltier plate can be used both directions- with a battery or using heat as an energy source. If they are unfamiliar with this concept, the diagram below will help explain.

Teacher Step by Step: A 3-d lesson should insist students do the thinking. Provide time and space for the students to experience the phenomenon and ask questions. The student sheet provided below provides guidance but is only an example of how students might respond.

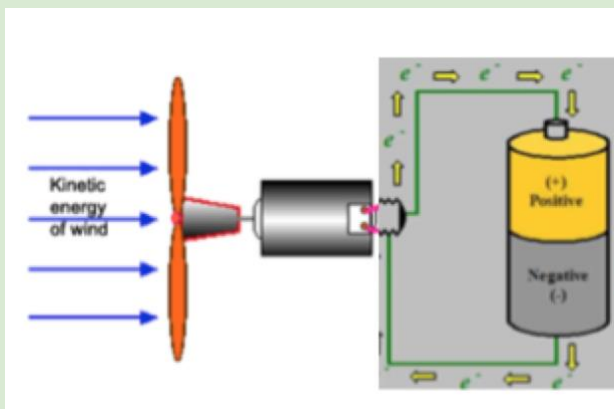
1. **Phenomenon: Show students a thermoelectric device (Peltier plate), connect it to a battery and have students pass it around the room. This works best if only 10-13 students handle each plate, their hands will heat up the cool side and make the effect less apparent. Students should feel one side hot and the other cold. Have students predict what the device might be used for.**
2. Introduce the problem that a great deal of heat is lost in all energetic systems.

Example of car engine efficiency:



From: <http://www.sankey-diagrams.com/tag/engine/>

Also, introduce (unless this is a lesson already presented) the concept of circuits moving in opposite directions. An example of a motor run by a battery which can also work as a generator charging a battery is a good example of this lesson plan. The following diagram may be discussed:

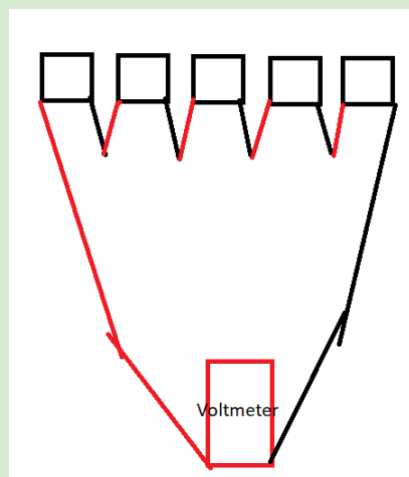


(the diagram is not correct with the flow of electrons) but the point is that the wind can generate electricity or the battery-operated motor can create wind.

3. Question: Can a Peltier Plate help save energy lost as heat in machines or other heat sources?
4. Give groups of students a set of materials (one peltier plate, hot and cold source, lightbulb, voltmeter) and ask them to put together an electric circuit using these devices and hot and cold sources. The goal is to create the

highest possible voltage and try to get a light bulb illuminated.

5. Let students know the minimum voltage for the light bulbs they have. (1.8 V is recommended)
6. Set out ice packs and keep HOT water available. Keep the hot water source filled, students will need refills. Make sure students have a safe way to transport the hot water to their lab stations- small beakers work well.
7. As students work, they should discover that they need hot on one side of the plate and cold on the other. Students often want to jump to connecting their lightbulb and feel frustrated that 'nothing' is happening. Encourage them to use their multimeter and measure the voltage of one plate before they add more. Let students work and struggle and think through their circuits for a good period of time 20-30 minutes or so.
8. Ask students to stop and draw their circuits. Remind them to write down the voltage they have measured.
9. Take a break to have a class discussion, have groups share what voltages they have measured, have a couple of groups (especially those with relatively high voltages) draw or explain what they have done.
10. Show the following video clip to explain a bit of the science behind the plates.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t53LGmpWLA&list=PLhsgFGm30oQ-dj6CelgRBjNQfEqX1xyld> (1:59 min)
11. After watching the video discuss how to connect the plates in series- You may wish to draw a diagram on the board and then give them a little bit more time in the lab to try once more to light up the bulb.



- 12.
13. After 10-15 minutes have students draw the circuit they have now created.
14. Discuss the uses of the plates. Ask, where is energy lost as heat in a car? The following video has an explanation of the uses of Peltier plates.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zzGnNkOxdpl> (5:30)
Charge your cell phone with a Peltier plate (thermoelectric generator) [click here](#)

Students should finish with the questions on the student sheet. If you haven't discussed criteria and constraints in engineering, now would be a good time.

Answers to questions:

1. *Answers will vary*
2. *The plates could be used for a device that generates lost heat.*
3. *Yes, a Peltier plate attached to the hot tailpipe could possibly generate electricity.*
4. *The plate would have to generate enough energy to make the extra weight and engineering worth the cost.*
5. *The costs associated with engineering design and materials availability would be constraints.*

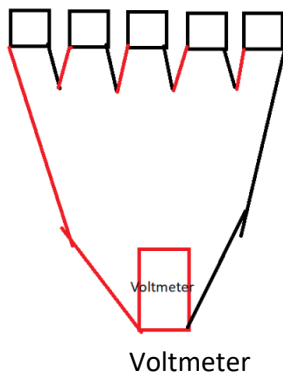
Assessment of Student Learning.

1. How is a Peltier Plate similar to an electric motor/generator? *The plate can work forward to create a current if hot and cold temps are available or it can create hot and cold if it is attached to a battery.*
2. What arrangement of Peltier Plates created the greatest voltage? *The greatest number of plates arranged in a series circuit.*
3. A shallow dish designed to keep food warm has a Peltier Plate on the bottom. What is needed to make it work? *A battery or electric current.*
4. How could the same dish be used to keep food cool? *The plate should be flipped.*

Thermal Energy Conversion Using Peltier Power

1. What is the unique property of a Peltier Plate?
 - a. When heated on one side, the other side gets cold.
 - b. When placed next to a heat source the plate become hot.
 - c. When two plates are placed together, they generate electricity.
 - d. When placed in an electric circuit, one side gets hot and the other cold.*
2. How much heat is lost in most energy conversions using fossil fuels, such as a car?
 - a. 10-20%
 - b. 30-40%
 - c. 50-70%*
 - d. 90-100%

Peltier Plates in a Series Circuit



3. The voltmeter in the circuit pictured above showed a current of 1.8 v. What is missing from the diagram?
 - a. The clips that show connections.
 - b. The battery that made the circuit work.
 - c. The light bulbs that lit up when the voltage was decreased.
 - d. The energy source-hot and cold substances above and below the plates.*

4. An electric motor will spin when placed in an electric circuit. When is the motor similar to the Peltier Plates pictured above?

- a. When a battery attached to the motor is connected.
- b. When a gasoline line is attached to the motor for energy.
- c. When the motor is attached to another motor in a circuit.
- d. When an energy source spins the motor to generate a current.*

Extension of lesson and Career Connections:

Geothermal Energy using the same idea of heat exchange. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DFQrE91kZwk>

Jobs in Geothermal Energy <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tsw4v0-vSgA>

HVAC Engineer <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nfHfiag02zo>

Extension: Talk about heat loss in car engines, light bulbs, etc., and how this is related to the peltier plates. There is currently research going on trying to use things like peltier plates to reduce wasted energy.

https://archive.unews.utah.edu/news_releases/powerpot-turns-heat-and-water-into-electricity/

<https://powerpractical.com/pages/how-do-thermoelectrics-work>